

## **‘To End Up on Your Table, and Shat Out of an Arse’: Stinky Front Rooms, Cabbages and Animal Rights in Anarcho-Punk.**

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It goes without saying animal rights were –and still are - central to anarchist punk. What follows are some personal, historical anecdotal accounts of some of the experiences and activities that helped shape who I am today and also my family. For obvious reasons the personal details of some of what follows are ethically omitted to protect the guilty.

To kick off, I’ve always been a right fussy eater. Much of the grey, British menu of the 1970s was grim, consisting of over-boiled vegetables, fatty chunks of various meats and gravy with fat swimming in it. Let’s just say I mostly looked forward to the marginally better puddings supplied by my long-suffering mother. From an early age I made the connection between death and food. Though being a vegetarian in a traditional working-class family was a rocky path indeed. My father used to loathe the fact that I hated meat. The sound of him banging the cutlery down in silence before threatening me to chew and swallow the greasy death-food is a memory that still haunts me. He used to shout “you won’t have another thing to eat this week, ‘laddie’ if you don’t eat everything on the plate”. Later I would vomit the said content up causing eventual concern that I’d lost so much weight I was becoming seriously ill. When my dad was at work during the day or away on business, which was often back then, I took to eating food in the front room. Haha, I was sneaky. I used to eat some of the meals off the tray then stash the rest on a ledge on the settee in carrier bags I sneaked out the cupboard: fish fingers and cakes, lumps of liver, beef cabbage and the occasional steak and kidney pie sat un-pestered in there, slowly decomposing. Obviously my mother thought me a good boy for eating everything on the plate and things improved for a week or two. I was off the hook for a bit. Then the smell arrived: I couldn’t dump the offending food in the bin as my mother was perpetually in the kitchen and being eight or nine years old I was scared of being caught. Hence, family were subject to the awful smell in the front room and turned the place over. The settee gave up its guilty secret and I was for the high jump. Once the offending bags were in the dustbin, I was taken by my father to the garage for the usual smacked arse- punctuating smacks with “don’t....ever....do that....again” and expressed through his very brutal interpretation of 1970s parenthood. I was traumatised. Wanker. Now I was back to the sound of slamming cutlery and fatherly threats...great. This time they thought I was more than a little odd. I’d certainly fuck with those thoughts over the next few years.

I got into punk. This was a total lifesaver for me. The music encapsulated the early teenage rage I was feeling at the state of the fucked-up state of the world. How I came by punk is another story. Let’s just say for now it seriously pissed my family off back then. The black sheep of the Gordon family? Got it in one! Aside from the my love of the UK Subs, SLF, The Clash and Sex Pistols, my mates from down the road had got into Crass. I’d already bought the (1979) *Reality Asylum* record but the politics of food came into sharp focus with the Flux of Pink Indians (1981) *Neu Smell 7”* and the Crass, *Stations of the Crass* LP (1979). Tracks from Flux like ‘Sick Butchers’ with lyrics stating, ‘you try to stroke me in a field, then go home and eat me as your meal’ and Crass’s ‘Time Out’...

there’s signs in the food stores advertising  
meat/beef-blade, chuck-roast, last you all the  
week/they’re saying that you like it, you’re saying

that you do/they don't have to force it and tell you how to chew/swallow it whole, without a fucking squeak/sitting there quietly and up they creep/you think you're fucking different, you think it's you and them/if they asked you a question you'd ask them when/you think you're hard done by, but you just want the same/chicken thighs, human-thighs, it's all the same old game.

These early lyrics were spot-on for me, making the clear connection between slaughtering animals and human-flesh as the same business. As Conflict said later: 'your blood, their blood.., serves the same'. Obviously this stuff seriously chimed with me and my distaste of meat, though most of these records were descriptive and not lyrically espousing direct-action. As I wrote in *Not Just Bits of Paper* (2014) it took a couple of false-starts for me to become vegetarian. My family were horrified and seriously worried how such a fussy eater who ate few vegetables and fuck-all else would survive as a vegetarian. Back then it wasn't easy but I managed: 'Realeat' burgers (mixed with egg) and sos/burger-mix was pretty much it as meat-substitute product. Each week, the diet became easier and I felt for the first time in my life like I was making a difference to the suffering of animals.

At school I got to be friends with a number of other punks who were on a similar path. When we met around 1981, we knew we had things in common. We hung out and discussed how we could make a difference. Let's just say this gave some of the dim-witted jocks a good reason to hate us more but we scared and confused them over the next few years to the point where they mostly left us alone. The school also noticed our change in politics, especially after one of our number graffitied 'Eat Wheat Not Meat' in letters five foot high on the barn wall. They knew we were responsible but couldn't prove it. Out of school we used to hang around and help out on the Animal Rights stall in Nottingham city centre on a Saturday morning getting the general public to sign petitions, give leaflets out and hassle fur shops, butchers and outlets selling stuff tested on animals. At one point we managed to show a BUAV (British Association for the Abolition of Vivisection) video to the entire school one afternoon. That certainly shook a few of our fellow pupils up, jocks included. As our engagement with animal rights increased our network of likeminded punks grew and so did the narrative of direct-action in the later anarcho-punk records dealing with animal rights. Back in the early to mid-eighties, things began to get militant in anarcho-punk terms. We used to attend Animal Rights Confederation meetings at the Nottingham Narrow Boat Pub deepening our involvement.

From anarcho-punk's musical output back then the whole anarcho-scene had begun to develop a real sense of urgency. The cold war threatened nuclear annihilation; Thatcher's police were shoving anyone around who didn't agree with her brave new free market world vision. Visually our clothes reflected this shift. Sex Pistols, UK Subs and general street-punk badges were swiftly removed swiftly replaced with larger 'Animals Have Rights' and 'Fishermen Smell' pins. Doctor Marten boots were replaced with cotton basketball and Rucanor shoes and espedurals: some of us replaced leather, studded jackets for regulation donkey and jackets and replacement PVC versions. Group-discussion shifted from music to animal rights over cold-war politics. German moleskin combat trousers replaced bondage trousers etc. Similarly the music of anarcho-punk clearly echoed these shifts; most of us at this time were around fifteen years old and the sentiments and music on the records perfectly captured our feelings regarding the exploitation of animals.. Most notably, Conflict with the track 'Meat is Murder' and the more intense songs on the (1984) *Increase the*

*Pressure* LP and *To a Nation of Animal Lovers* 7" ep (1983) perfectly summed up these feelings. Other classic songs were Rudimentary Peni's 'Pig in a Blanket' (1983); Anti-System's 'Wot No Meat' (1984) and the Subhumans *Evolution* e.p. (1983). The whole UK anarcho output was notable for the unprecedented theme of explicitly discussing animal rights. For me one of the most striking songs of the time summing up our feelings on vivisection arrived on the groundbreaking (1983) Antisect LP *In Darkness, There is No Choice* LP on the track 'Tortured and Abused':

I am an animal strapped to a chair.  
Nobody helps me because nobody cares  
Humanity injects me and injects me again  
Why am I subjected to such unbearable pain?  
Why?....Why Must I Die?

Likewise the Conflict track, *Meat is Murder* directly addressed the horror of the meat trade on the 1982 LP *'It's Time to See Who's Who'*:

The factory is churning out all processed packed  
and neat. An obscure butchered substance and the  
label reads 'MEAT'. Hidden behind false names such  
as pork, ham, veal and beef. An eye's an eye, a  
life's a life, the now forgotten belief. And  
everyday production farms are feeding out this  
farce. To end up on a table and shat out of an  
arse.

Conflict certainly aligned themselves with animal-rights and direct-action anarchism appealing to the urgency of doing something about the shit state of the world we all felt back then (still do!). We went to see Conflict and most of the other, numerous anarcho bands back then providing an excellent soundtrack to some of the actions we'd later be involved in. Tales of the activities at these shows takes a back-seat for the present tale. More important were the actions and activities the records and the anarcho-punk scene inspired us to become involved in direct-action politics.

The city-centre animal rights stall, the Narrow-Boat Animal Rights confederation meetings and political information-tables at gigs back then provided an information-hub allowing us to engage and network with older, more active, peers. Animal rights back then was not so much of a single-issue politics and more bound up with the political zeitgeist of the time. As a punk movement we dealt with police oppression, the miners' strike, Cruise missiles, The Falklands War and fucking capitalism in general. That said, for us animal rights went to the heart of all that seemed wrong with the world.

We were angry and decided to do something about us from super-gluing locks of butchers' shops; stickering products in chemists tested on animals; pouring paint into the pockets of fur coats, picketing fur shops and department stores selling then and my favourite Saturday activity: dropping stink-bombs in the eating areas of burger restaurants. Every little helped back then. Our confidence in direct-action was building.

Through 1983-4 we began to attend organised demonstrations against animal-abuse alongside anti-nuclear protests. Our local army-base, Chilwell-depot, was rumoured to be in preparation to store Cruise missiles. I attended a number of these 'Reclaim Chilwell, demonstrations and the ideological differences between street and anarcho-punks were made personally explicit for me at one particular event. After a rather unfortunate incident left me with two broken-wrists in plaster, I was approached by a number of 'ex'-punks and UK82 types who spotted my badges and black, spiky hair...one of them was straight in my face blasting his shitty beer-breath at me. "Are you pro or anti-

peace mate?" The dumb, baiting question knocked me for six. My response came in a nervous tone: "I'm pro peace mate, what the fuck do you think I'm". Then, before I could get the words "doing here" I got caught- a vicious left hook knocking me over a garden wall and load of roses. The taste of oxygen, surprise of the cowardly sucker-punch obviously left me startled. Fucker nearly broke my jaw. My good mates carried me off with my first memory of how punks can be right bullies and rednecks (sadly the same is still evident today). This would not be the last experience of such twattery. Indeed it was the first crack in my naive teenage conception that punks were unified in their belief that peace and striving for a better world was a good thing. The small direct-actions continued and my bust wrists gradually healed in time for the next proper demonstration.

By Spring 1984 the Nottingham Animal Rights Confederation took us on a coach trip to a demonstration in Birmingham against the then notorious Singh-Gill owned Cocksparrow silver-fox fur farm. The latter was unscrupulously breeding these animals to supply the burgeoning market for fur-coats in the 1980s. Scumbag. The coach set off from outside Ye Olde Salutation Inn, Nottingham at 8am. We huddled around in the misty early morning in donkey jackets, smoking roll-ups and chatting. The bus was filled pretty quickly with a motley crew of old hippies, peace activists, anarcho-punks and a sprinkling of the general public for the smoke-filled journey to the demo.

The farm was located a couple of miles outside of Coventry and when we arrived we were met with loads of other coaches and fucking hundreds of coppers surrounding the entire farm. The whole gamut of 1980s protest was out in force; miners, CND activists, Class War and a host of others. 'Coal not Dole' stickers were everywhere as the miners were getting really shafted by Thatcher's bully boys: we were about to get a taste of this 'public order management' ourselves. Memories are hazy on all the details though I remember most of the protestors left to their own devices group shouting "Human Freedom, Animal Rights, One Struggle, One Fight" at the seemingly endless lines of coppers. They stood there in silent rows and we walked right up to their faces asking if they knew what they were protecting. Often the response from her majesties 'Bobbies' was "fuck off, or I'll nick you!" The Farmer, Singh-Gill was hauled-up in his house in the middle of the farm and the central objective was one of direct action, to get through the police lines and get the animals out of their cages.

The demo seemed to be going nowhere, just one big shouting-match until the crowd mood became anger at audible animal cries from the farm. Various protestors were doing mock charges at police-lines followed by a collective...." ah not really". This sort of thing went on for a while until the protest reached critical mass with everyone congregated near the animal sounds. The real charge began with the police pushing back followed by a row of horses pushing us away - flash arresting people - herding us through a fence, towards fields. Collective chants of "scum, scum, scum" filled the air. Spare change from pocket's thrown at the copper went over in waves as they pushed onwards. It was chaos: and, in short, I was in the middle of it. The police charge continued into what luckily transpired to be a ripe cabbage field. Bingo. All of a sudden the sky was black with flying cabbages flying overhead, bouncing off the coppers like some bizarre acid trip. The Police retreated under another volley of flying cabbages and the standoff continued back at square one. The chanting lasted for another hour or so with a couple of arrests before the demo wound down to a handful. We ended the day in a pub reflecting on the protest while staring at our muddy clothes and boots. Sipping my well-earned pint of Guinness, I was politely reminded by another protester at the bar that the drink wasn't vegan! This was an indicator of the later transgression of how the whole diet issue would move uncomfortably up a gear.

Back on the bus we were all slightly drunk and were treated to various sing-songs of various punk tunes with the later Pistol's Ronnie Biggs classic, 'No One Is Innocent' blasting out in a drunken chorus on the way back to Notts.

The rest of 1984 carried on as before with a good amount of us leaving school and having our first taste of a Government Youth Training scheme. We became regular faces on various demonstrations throughout that year and our covert animal rights 'actions' continued unabated. I remember being chased up a street after calling a load of butchers in the local shop "fat murdering bastards. Around Christmas that year we were arrested for causing a breach of the peace in MacDonald's for staging and impromptu sit-in demanding they stop exploiting animals. It was all good natured until the police showed up and we were charged with aggravated breach of the peace. Myself and a mate ended up facing borstal for allegedly threatening the manager of that establishment: that never happened. I remember my father coming to our court date telling me he wanted to see me sent down. Wanker. Luckily in spite of one of the witnesses lying through his teeth, we got off with a fine and a conditional discharge.

As we moved into 1985 things got more extreme with various Notts folk smashing butchers and fur shop windows. This culminated with a serious of mass-arrests leaving a lot of the animal rights activists facing jail. Jail did happen for a couple of mates, found guilty of crimes though I escaped with the above breach of the peace conviction. With Crass ending their project in 1984 and Conflict and others inspiring fresh waves of direct action, things got heavy before tailing off to the thrash-metal years beyond the scope of this piece. Arguments began to surface about who was the most vegan or most active; the collective struggle we'd embarked upon was beginning to fracture. In short certain individuals were hell-bent on making value judgements not based on the action undertaken but whether or not a packet in your cupboard back then contained a suspicious non-vegan 'e' number. Fuck off! I found a lot of this showing-off of scene plumage tiring, and to be honest, after the chaos of 1984 and the turmoil of 1985 exhausting. Also in the spring of 85' I took the plunge into veganism though with my severe distaste of vegetables my diet plummeted to new un-nutritional depths. Glandular fever hit me hard and virtually wiped me out for six weeks. I remember being out of it and hallucinating into the anarcho record sleeve posters on my bedroom wall. The doc put my illness down to a lack of nutrition from a shit diet. That said by '86 I was on an entirely different punk path.

The legacy of all this is the whole animal rights and vegan/vegetarian politics are ubiquitous in the DiY scene with some many genre variations in new styles of music it becomes scarcely recognisable to the movement that grew in the early eighties. With a new bastard Tory government at the UK helm and the possible reintroduction of hunting with dogs coupled with blatant neo-liberal attacks on the poor and disabled the new barricades against the current scary neo-liberal onslaught against us all. The personal legacy is in spite of a couple of tiny lapses, I'm still vegetarian and my daughter's been and still is vegetarian from birth. Meat still fucking stinks!